

Chapter 17 of the 1689 Confession of Faith: “Of The Perseverance of the Saints”,
Session # 6, “Perseverance and the Covenant”, Presented by Pastor
Paul Rendall in the Adult Sunday School, on September 10th, 2017.

Paragraph 2 – This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, (d) flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ (e) and union with him, the (f) oath of God, the abiding of His Spirit, and the (g) seed of God within them, and the nature of the (h) covenant of grace; from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

(d)Romans 8:30; 9:11,16; (e)Romans 5:9-10; John 14:19; (f)Hebrews 6:17-18; (g) 1st Jo 3:9; (h) Jeremiah 32:40

1st John 3: 6-10 – Whoever abides in Him does not sin.” “Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.” “Little children, let no one deceive you.” “He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.” “He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning.” “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.”

Now we want to talk about abiding in Christ. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. This does not mean that He will never sin a sin. But it means that if that Christian is abiding in Him; persevering in remaining by faith in seeing Christ as His righteousness and is sincerely attempting to practice righteousness; keeping the commandments of God, and loving His brother, He will not prove Himself to be an unbeliever. He will practice righteousness (he will do righteousness) even as Christ is righteous. He that commits sin is of the devil. Again, it is the practice of sin that is being talked about, not committing just one sin. Each of us, if we see ourselves rightly as a believer, has many sins of his heart to confess on a regular basis, and probably not a few sins in relation to the things that he says and does which are observable by men. Whoever is born of God doth not commit sin (or does not sin); for His seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” Again – This does not mean that a believer cannot sin, for in himself, that is, in his flesh, there is no good thing, but in having the Holy Spirit abiding with him and in him, and having the internal principle of grace in his soul, the New Nature, He has the seed of everything good in him. It is in this sense that it can be said that he does not sin or cannot commit sin. Nothing proceeding from the New Nature has any sin in it. It is only as thoughts or actions are tainted by the flesh that the person becomes defiled. Therefore, how important it is to put off the deeds of the flesh and walk in the Spirit!

Spurgeon on Perseverance –THE FINAL PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS. NO. 1361 DELIVERED ON LORD’S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 24TH, 1877, “First we argue the perseverance of the saints, most distinctly from the nature of the life which is imparted at regeneration. What saith Peter concerning this life? (1st Peter 1: 23.) He speaks of the people of God as “being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.” The new life which is planted in us when we are born again is not like the fruit of our first birth, for that is subject to mortality, but it is a divine principle, which cannot die nor be corrupt; and, if it be so, then he who possesses it must live forever, must, indeed, be evermore what the Spirit of God in regeneration has made him. So in 1st John 3: 9 we have the same thought in another form. “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” That is to say, the bent of the Christian’s life is not towards sin. It would not be a fair description of his life that he lives in sin; on the contrary, he fights and contends against sin, because he has an inner principle which cannot sin. The new life sinneth not; it is born of God, and cannot transgress; and though the old nature warreth against it, yet doth the new life so prevail in the Christian that he is kept from living in sin. Our Savior, in his simple teaching of the gospel to the Samaritan woman, said to her (John 4:13), “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” Now, if our Savior taught this to a sinful and ignorant woman, at his first interview with her, I take it that this doctrine is not to be reserved for the inner circle of full-grown saints, but to be preached ordinarily among the common people, and to be held up as a most blessed privilege. If you receive the grace which Jesus imparts to your souls, it shall be like the good part which Mary chose, it shall not be taken away from you; it shall abide in you, not as the water in a cistern, but as a living fountain springing up unto everlasting life.”

The Perseverance of the Saints rests upon the Nature of the Covenant of Grace –

Jeremiah 32: 36-40 – “Now therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you say, ‘It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, by the famine, and by the

pestilence: Behold, I will gather them out of all countries where I have driven them in My anger, in My fury, and in great wrath; I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely. They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.”

J.C. Philpot says – “As the fear of God springs up in a believing soul, and is maintained and kept alive by the influences which come out of Christ as a covenant Head, it produces, as its effects, an abiding in him. We cannot depart from him, because the fear of God is in our heart. It is therefore called “a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death”. If a fountain of life, it must be fed out of him who is the life; and as it departs from the snares of death, it cleaves more fully and closely to him as these snares are broken to pieces and left behind.

If we examine the movements of godly fear in our hearts, we shall see that all its tendencies are toward life and the Source of life; toward hatred of sin and love of holiness; toward a desire after the enjoyment of heavenly realities, and a deadness to the things of time and sense; toward a knowledge of Christ in the manifestation of himself, and a longing to live more to his praise, to walk more in his footsteps, and to be more conformed to his suffering image.

Now, as none of these things can be produced but by union with Christ and abiding in him, we see how the fear of God helps forward and is needful to this abiding. For directly that the fear of God burns low in the soul, there is a gradual withdrawing from, and a sensible declining of this abiding in Christ.”

Ezekiel 36: 22-27 – ““Therefore say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord GOD: "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD," says the Lord GOD, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”

John Calvin says on this verse – “Now follows an explanation, Because I will not depart, etc. The אֲשֶׁר *asher*, here is not a relative, but rather an explanatory or exegetic particle. It then briefly designates the form or nature of the covenant, even that God would never depart from behind them God is sometimes said to go before his faithful people, when he shows to them the right way. He is said also to rule them from behind, as when Isaiah says, “They shall hear a voice behind them, saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” (Isaiah 30:21)

God no doubt testifies here, that he would be always an Instructor and Teacher to his people. And he says, that he will speak from behind, as schoolmasters follow the pupils committed to their care, even that they may observe and watch all their gestures, walking, words, and everything else. So God compares himself to those teachers to whom children are committed to be taught and trained; and he says that he speaks from behind. We may then explain what is here said in this sense, “I will not depart from after thee:” but we may also take a simpler view that God would not depart from them, even because he would show them perpetual favor and kindness, according to what is immediately added, that I may do them good. In a word, God shows that he would be an eternal Father to his people, who would never forsake nor cast them away.

But the manner or method is also expressed, that he would put his fear in their hearts, that they might never depart from him. This is the same doctrine with what we have already seen; it is now repeated, but in other words; and thus God, as I said, more fully illustrates his favor, he says then that he would put his fear in the hearts of men. We now see how that puerile fiction is refuted, with which the Papists are inebriated, when they say that God’s grace co-operates, because the Spirit helps the infirmity of men, as though they themselves brought something of their own and were co-operators. But the Prophet here testifies that the fear of God is the work and gift of the Holy Spirit. He does not say I will give them power to fear me, but I will put my fear in their hearts We then see that he again shews that the Spirit works effectually in us, so as to form anew our affections, and does not leave us capable of turning or suspended. The same thing is said by Ezekiel, “And I will cause them to fear me.” (Ezekiel 36: 27) Thus the same doctrine is confirmed there, for it is said, that God would make Israel to fear him, not that they might be able to fear him.

He adds again, That they may not depart from me We see that clearly refuted are those foolish notions about neutral grace, which offers only power to men, which they may afterwards receive if they please; for the Prophet says, “that they may not depart from me.” Thus he again shews that perseverance, no less than the commencement of acting rightly, is the gift of God and the work of the Holy Spirit: and as I have already said, were God only to form our hearts once, that we might be disposed to act rightly, the devil might, at any moment, entice us, by his wiles, from the right way, or, as he employs sudden and violent attacks, he might drive us up and down as he pleases. To rule us then for one hour would avail us nothing, except God preserved us through the whole course of our life, and led us on to the end. It hence then follows, that the whole course of our life is directed by the Spirit of God, so that the end no less than the beginning of good works ought to be ascribed to his grace. Whatever merit then men claim for themselves, they take away from God, and thus they become sacrilegious.

A question may, however, be here raised: we see that the faithful often stumble, not ten times during life, but every day: how then is this, that where God’s Spirit works, his efficacy is such that men never turn aside from the right way? Were any to answer, that the faithful indeed stumble, but do not wholly fail, and that God here refers to that defection which shakes off every fear of God, it would not be a full solution. For we see that even the elect themselves are sometimes like apostates, for the fear of God and piety are, as it were, choked in them. Piety is not indeed extinguished, but not even a spark of the Spirit appears in them. But we must notice, that inflexible perseverance is given to the faithful, so that when they fall, they soon repent. Hence interruptions are no hindrances that God should not guide them from the starting-post to the goal, until they complete their whole course. And thus true is what Augustine says, that the Spirit so works in us, that we invariably have a good will. For he compares our state with that of Adam, such as he was in his first creation. We know that Adam was then without any stain, for he was formed in the image of God: he was then upright and free from every vice. We are as yet imperfect; though God has regenerated us by his Spirit, there abide in us still some remnants of the flesh, and we do not run with so much alacrity as it behooves us; nay, we are constrained to exclaim with Paul, that we are “wretched,” and to confess that we do not the good which we would, but the evil which is hateful to us. (Rom_7:15) Then the condition of Adam seems to have been better than ours.

To this Augustine replies, — that God deals better with us now than he did with Adam, our first parent; for though he created him just and innocent, and without any stain, yet he gave him a nature liable to a change; and hence Adam, having a free-will, immediately fell. To what end then did free-will serve? even that man immediately fell and brought us into the same ruin with himself. This is the praise of free-will! even that man, possessed of it, cast himself down into the lowest abyss, whence he could never of himself have risen. But now, with respect to us, though we halt, and also turn out of the right way, and our depraved lusts entice us to evil, and our corruption hinders us from running as we desire to do, yet our condition is far better, because God endues us amidst all our conflicts with the power of his own Spirit, so that we are never overcome or overwhelmed. This indefectible constancy, (*indeclinabilis constantia*) as Augustine calls it, is then far superior to the excellency and honor which Adam at first possessed. This may be clearly gathered from the words of the Prophet when he says, that God would put his fear in the hearts of his people, so that they may never depart from him.”

Paragraph 3 - And though they may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of means of their preservation, fall into grievous i)sins, and for a time continue therein j), whereby they incur k)God’s displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit, come to have their graces and l)comforts impaired, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded, m)hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments n)upon themselves, yet shall they renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.

i) Matthew 26: 70, 72, 74; k) Isaiah 64: 5, 9; Ephesians 4: 30; l) Psalm 51: 10,12;

m) Psalm 32: 3-4; n) 2nd Samuel 12:14; o) Luke 22: 32, 61-62